

route by
Keriya
river.

opening up a route to the Tārīm along the Keriya river¹¹. Dr. Hedin's journey in 1896 has since proved that the Amban's belief in the possibility of traversing the sands between the present end of the river course and Tārīm without serious difficulty was well founded. On the line followed by the Swedish explorer, which must correspond approximately to the old extension of the river-bed, patches of vegetation and relatively near subsoil water are to be found constantly down to the southernmost branch of the Tārīm¹². There is good reason to believe that the opening of this route, by the digging of wells and the establishment of small posts, would prove no very formidable task even for the present administration.

Importance
of route to
Kuchā.

A glance at the map shows that the route along the extant course of the Keriya river and its old extension towards the Tārīm forms the most direct line of communication between the whole Khotan region and the ancient territory of Kuchā, and the other oases further to the north-east¹³. That close relations existed politically between Kuchā and the Khotan kingdom, its immediate neighbour to the south, is attested by the fact that the submission of Khotan to Chinese supremacy in 648 A.D. is described in the T'ang Annals as the direct result of the conquest of Kuchā¹⁴. It is equally certain that the cultural affinities between the two states, the frontiers of which adjoined in the desert, must have been great¹⁵. The importance of using the nearest route for communication must have been felt more than ever after the administrative head quarters of the Protectorate of An-hsi, controlling 'the Four Garrisons', and thus also Khotan, had first been established at Kuchā in 648 or 649 A.D.¹⁶

Kara-dong,
a station on
Keriya
river route.

On the grounds here indicated I think we can safely assume that there lay in early times along the banks of the Keriya Daryā a route regularly followed by traffic, just as that along the Khotan Daryā is at present. Kara-dong lies about halfway between the Tārīm and the main oasis of Khotan, and a small station established here would have conveniently served the double object of affording a safe resting-place to caravans, and of watching the route for customs or police purposes. A small settlement, with a Bāzār, &c., might well have existed by the side of such a post, just as found by the side of many a 'Langar' on modern caravan routes of Eastern Turkestan, and this is all that the traceable remains indicate. The natives may, indeed, call the remains a *kōne-shahr*, using the term which is applied throughout the country to old remains of any kind, even the smallest. But to talk of an 'ancient city' here would imply more imagination than a critical student need care to take credit for.

Period of
abandon-
ment.

There is no direct evidence to indicate the exact age of the ruined quadrangle or the date when it was abandoned. But from the fact that among the coins picked up there were no T'ang pieces, it appears probable that the site was deserted earlier than, e.g., Dandān-Uiliq, where coins of the K'ai-yüan period (713-741 A.D.) and of later T'ang issues were common. On the other hand, the pieces, without legend or bearing the characters *wu-chu*, which Kara-dong yielded all show marks of long circulation, like those found at Endere. The finding of

¹¹ See *Mission D. de Rhins*, i. p. 172.

¹² See Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, pp. 54 sqq.

¹³ The saving in distance, as against the modern route down the Khotan Daryā and thence via Ak-su, becomes still more evident when we remember that the settlements about Dandān-Uiliq allowed travellers to move straight from the Keriya river to the Khotan capital without touching the present oasis of Keriya.

¹⁴ See Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 126; also above, p. 175.

¹⁵ Comp. Hsüan-tsang's description of Kuchā and its

people (*Mémoires*, i. pp. 3 sqq.; Watters, *Yuan Chwang's Travels*, i. p. 59) with that given of Khotan; also the T'ang Annals' accounts of both territories, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 124 sq., 125 sq. For a curious point of contact specially noted by the Chinese annalists, see *ibid.*, p. 115; above, p. 139.

See also the story told by Hsüan-tsang of the Khotan minister at Kuchā and the subsequent miraculous transfer of a Buddha statue from Kuchā; *Mémoires*, ii. p. 230; above, p. 225.

¹⁶ See above, p. 60.